

AT THE FAMILY ALTAR.

Where the patriarchs pitched the tent there they builded an altar, and worshipped God. Family religion was established, bound the family together, sanctified the daily life, sought and found the blessing of the covenant-keeping God. When our fathers penetrated the American wilderness and built their first rude cabins of logs, they also built their altars and called upon the name of the Lord. If the family is the unit of human society, family religion is the obvious and essential element, and daily family worship in some form is the necessary expression and the means of its cultivation and its abiding power.

The importance seems so great that the obligation is imperative. The daily gathering of the household before God, in some brief and simple way making acknowledgement, bringing thanks, asking protection, guidance, help, has values beyond estimate. It sanctifies the home and consecrates the love. It magnifies the Word as a lamp unto our feet. It brings the old and young to the recognition of the highest things in life. It exalts religion above labor and business and pleasure. It lightens care and sweetens even irksome duty and weary drudgery. It blesses all the day. It writes good and wholesome memories to go with the young into many far off places, and into new homes, far out in the temptations and perils of the unknown sea of life.

Yet, we have set out to say, that much of the complaint about the neglect of family worship, coming from pastors and sessions and Presbyteries, seems to us, if it be not harsh and unduly censorious, still oblivious of changed conditions and unsympathetic, as it is without help and encouragement. It must be known to all that the conditions of family life have been changed extensively. There are fewer homes in which life is normal, the father and mother and their children in a home with regular hours and without haste. Life is very busy and strenuous and exacting nowadays, and nearly every household, especially in the towns and often in the country, too, is invaded by irregularity and haste. Fathers are absent for days and sometimes for weeks, and the number increases, occasional business travel, commercial travellers, employees of railroads and navigation lines, and not forgetting evangelists and missionaries. Sons are off to work at early hours. Children are hurried off to school. There are many homes where the family does not and can not sit down together at a leisurely breakfast table and there are few that can then gather about the hearth for a chapter from the Word of God, and together kneel for the heavenly Father's blessing.

We devoutly wish it could be so in every home. In some no doubt it could be yet secured where there is parental authority and a pious and persistent purpose. But the changed condition is evident and in large degree it is simply inevitable and irresistible. And we wish our good ministers and venerable elders, who are living in quiet homes in the eddies of the hurrying stream of life in the present day, would recognize conditions and be lenient in their judgments.

But it must not follow that the family altar shall be neglected. Some thoughtful care will find ways of adaptation. Let the Bible be on the breakfast table, and father or mother or sister read a few verses reverently, and kneeling or standing at the chairs a brief prayer be offered. In some homes we know, where a fuller gathering is at the supper table, then is the worship of the household. Sometimes the school boy reads the Scripture passage, and sometimes his sister. We have known a home in which the elder sister, fatherless and motherless, leads the little flock "lest they forget." And many a widowed mother takes a father's place and keeps the flame bright upon the altar.

Suppose a good pastor who never scolds makes it his duty to know conditions in each home, and kindly finds some way to build the altar, and invite and persuade the daily family remembrance of God's mercies, and the daily seeking for "the blessing that maketh rich and addeth no sorrow." Suppose the minister and the session unite in a definite and loving purpose to have the Church established in every household. How large and rich the blessing that will follow!

J. P. S.

THE GROWTH OF OUR COUNTRY

And Progress of the Gospel.

A circular from the Department of Commerce and Labor, recently at hand, presents some facts of special interest to Christians.

The total area of the United States is about equal to that of the whole of Europe! This suggests the question, what a power for good in the world this may develop if only it can be kept in the service of the Lord Jesus. Suppose that the whole of Europe were unitedly and effectively Protestant: what could it accomplish for Christ? But with the happy initiative of the past, the United States can be made and kept dominantly Protestant. What, then, is its possibility for the saving of souls?

There is an immense Roman Catholic immigration, from year to year; does some one ask, Will not this destroy the dominance of Protestant influence? Reply: This document tells us that during the 88 years from 1820 to the present, the total number of immigrants into this country amounts to more than twenty-six million. Of these immigrants, considerably more than half, perhaps fifteen million or upward, were from Roman Catholic lands. Since they have been here, families have grown up in these Catholic homes, adding to this fifteen million. And prior to 1820 there were Catholics here. Yet at this present time the Roman Catholic Church claims only twelve million adherents, including baptized infants, in the United States. Romanism, so far from infringing on Protestantism, is failing in this land to hold its own.

On the other hand, Presbyterianism is gaining on the population. Our Church reports only adult church members. In the year 1820, out of a total population of less than ten million, there were upwards of 72,000 Presbyterian communicants. This is less than one per cent, a little over three-quarters of one per cent. At the present time, out of an estimated population of eighty-